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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate education students can often discuss the language experience approach intelligently, listing advantages and disadvantages with ease, but express bewilderment when it comes time in a reading practicum class to actually use the approach with a child. A teaching guide can serve as an aid to those students who have previously studied the approach. In a practicum setting where limited time and space are available, the story dictation and story writing portion of a total language experience program receives emphasis. Since the approach differs somewhat depending on whether the child is at readiness level, is a beginning reader, or is reading at second or third grade level, method sheets can be used for each category. In kindergarten or first grade, the language experience approach can be used alone or along with a basal readiness program. Once the teacher has made a decision on grouping the students, he or she may choose from one of three alternative instructional methods. Language experience procedures for the beginning reader include story writing and story dictation activities in a variety of settings using a variety of stimuli. The child who is already reading can follow the same basic procedures outlined for the beginning reader but does not need as much direct instruction. Emphasis should be on comprehension, vocabulary building, on expanding writing skills, and on editing the completed story in preparation for publication. (RS)

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SUGGESTED STEPS IN LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH INSTRUCTION

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"I love the Language Experience Approach but I don't know how to do it." Undergraduate students can often discuss the language experience approach intelligently, listing advantages and disadvantages with ease, but express bewilderment when it comes time in a Reading Practicum class to actually use the approach with the child. As an aid to those students who have previously studied the approach, the following teaching activities guide was prepared. Since the approach differs somewhat depending on whether the child is at readiness level, is a beginning reader, or is reading at second or third grade level or above, three methods sheets were prepared.

In a practicum setting where limited time and space are available, the story dictation and story writing portion of a total language experience program receives emphasis because a total program, utilizing learning centers with varied language arts activities, is usually impossible. Story dictation and story writing, however, are at the core of

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the total language experience program and should receive particular emphasis while potential teachers are in training.

The most difficult thing for beginning teachers to understand is that there is no exact, step-by-step, procedure they will be following with every child every day. The various steps in these methods sequences are to be viewed as guidelines and teachers must be flexible in changing the order or eliminating some of the steps as needed with their child.

Although some very specific strategies are referenced within the body of the methods sheets, overall acknowledgments of general language experience procedures should be given to those recognized leaders in language experience whose materials over the years have taught this writer not only the techniques to be used but the importance and value of the approach to children in the classroom. Those people are Allen, 1976, 1974; Allen, 1976; Allen and Allen, 1976; Hall, 1981; Hall, 1978; Lee and Allen, 1963; Nessel and Jones, 1981; Stauffer, 1980; and Veatch, et al., 1973.

STAGE ONE
LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE AND BASAL READINESS

In kindergarten or first grade, the language experience approach can be used alone or along with the basal readiness program to introduce a variety of readiness skills as well as help provide for the individual differences that occur in any classroom at this level.

The teacher may wish to start this program in kindergarten sometime after an orientation period of two to four weeks has passed and the children are familiar with the routine of the room.

If the basal and language experience are used together, the materials to be used are the basal workbook or other material which comes along with the basal reader program for the district, picture and letter cards, large lined story charts, and various other materials as needed for each week's session.

Before the instructional program is begun, each child should be individually tested to determine which letters and letter sounds are already known. Any children who are showing some signs of reading should also be checked with a word list to determine their sight word knowledge. If a child happens to be reading beyond a preprimer level on the word list, an informal reading inventory should also be administered to determine that child's reading level.

After testing, the teacher will decide on one of two grouping possibilities. She/he may decide to teach the whole class as one large group, meeting individual differences within the various activities presented in the program. Or, she/he may choose to group the children based on their current skills knowledge into two or three groups and work with those groups at different paces with the skills presented determined by the needs of the group. The teacher may then proceed with one of the following alternatives:

Alternative 1.

1. Teach the basal readiness book as suggested in the manual. The instruction may be whole class or in two or three ability groups which move at difference paces through the material.

2. In addition to the basal, at least once or twice during the week, the teacher will invite whole class dictation on a subject determined by the teacher. (See Cromwell, 1980, for suggested topics and stimulus activities appropriate for this age.) Instructions will proceed as follows:

    a. Seat the children on the floor in a group and present a stimulus or topic for discussion. Lead a thorough oral discussion, encouraging many children to participate. Teach them procedures for taking turns in a group.

b. Display a lined chart tablet and invite the children to dictate several sentences about the topic. Write down exactly what they say. Accept their language even if it includes grammar errors or incomplete syntax.

c. As you write, point out general readiness items such as:

1. We start at the top and write from top to bottom.

2. We start at the left and write to the right.

3. Using our alphabet, I can write down the words that you say.

4. I can read the words that I have written and you can read along with me.

5. We leave spaces between words.

6. Some words have capital (or upper case) letters, but most words have all lower case letters.

7. We can find letters we know and words we know on the chart.

8. Special marks on the page are called periods, question marks, and commas. (Later you may also include exclamation marks and quotation marks.)

d. Read the chart to and then with the children, pointing to each word as it is read.

e. Display the chart story in the room along with previous stories. Assist any child who freely goes to the chart during centers or play time to find letters or words he/she knows or to try to read the chart. No other direct teaching of the chart is done and children are not expected to learn any particular words. However, any child who does make an attempt to read or find known letters is encouraged and assisted.

Alternative 2.

1. Using the basal readiness book as a guide, introduce one letter per week, supplementing the basal with a variety of activities.

Day 1 -

a. Introduce the letter name and sound using manuscript letter cards and a picture card that will be the "magic picture" for the letter. The sound must occur at the beginning of the word.

b. Display a number of picture cards, one at a time, in a pocket chart and contrast each beginning sound to the magic picture. Make two columns of pictures, one of which contains picture cards that start the same as the magic picture and one which contains pictures that do not start the same. Let the children participate in placing the pictures and pronouncing the sounds.

c. Send home a letter card showing the correct formation of the letters and the name of the magic picture. Also send a note explaining that each Monday the children will receive a new letter for the week. They are to locate magazine pictures which have that sound at any place in the word and bring them to school the next day.

Day 2 -

a. Place three large sheets of paper on a bulletin board or chalkboard. Write the letter at the top of each sheet.

b. Review the letter name and sound and the name of the magic picture with the class.

c. Invite each child to come one at a time with their pictures. Have them name the picture and help them decide whether the sound is at the beginning, middle, or end of the word. Help them quickly tape the picture to the beginning, middle, or end piece of paper. Ask the class to name the picture and produce the sound.

Day 3 & 4 -

a. Present a creative activity related to the letter under study. Taylor's (1985) lesson plan for the letter **p** is given as an example.

DAILY LESSON PLANS

Behavioral Objectives:

1. The child will dictate a language experience story containing words beginning with the letter **p**.

2. The child will identify the letter **p** and locate **p** at the beginning of words.

3. The child will identify pictures which begin with the sound **p**.

Learning Activities:

1. To establish a background, read the poem, "Walking Through a Pumpkin Patch." Play the record and let the children sing along. Encourage them to discuss what they might see on such a walk.

2. Show a pumpkin and tell the children that they will examine it to see if it fits the description used in the poem and song.

3. Allow the children to touch and pick up the pumpkin. Cut it open and have them reach inside to scoop out the seeds. Cut it in half so that they can see the inside more clearly.

4. Discuss the pumpkin. Ask, "What does it look like? What did it feel like?" Ask for descriptive words to tell about the pumpkin.

5. Fact storm--ask the children to help name all the characteristics of the pumpkin and then list them. Ask them to dictate a story using the descriptive words to tell about the pumpkin.

6. Have the children title their story and then read it aloud to them, pointing to the words as they are read.

7. Have the group and then individuals read along with the teacher.

8. Teach the sound-letter relationship for **p**, using the word pumpkin, following the procedure outlined by Nessel and Jones, pp. 57-59.

Evaluation:

1. Was story dictated willingly and read fluently?

2. Were the children able to find words in their story which began with **p**?

3. Could they identify pictures beginning with the sound **p** when presented with page 38 of workbook, Early Light?

Materials:

Poem and record, "Walking Through a Pumpkin Patch" by Lucille Wood, Rhythms to Reading, Boman Publishing Company.

Pumpkin, knife, spoons, newspapers.

Chalkboard and chalk, chart paper, and wide magic marker.

Early Light student book.

b. Following the procedures outlined in Alternative 1, invite the children to dictate and read back a language experience story related to the creative activities just completed, readiness skills as in Alternative 1, and particularly point out any occurrence of the letter under study.

c. Help the children complete any supplemental worksheets as needed.

Day 5 -

a. Teach the basal readiness book page(s).

b. Supplement with other activities such as records, tapes, plastic objects, or enrichment paper and pencil tasks as needed.

c. During writing time, provide direct instruction in letter formation if that is not already included in the materials being used. Use chalkboard and paint activities as well as paper and pencil.

Alternative 3.

1. At least once a week, present a social studies or science stimulus to the class.

2. After adequate hands-on activities and oral work, invite the children to dictate.

3. Follow the dictation and reading procedures outlined in **Alternative 1**, stage 2a through 2e.

4. In addition to general readiness skills, highlight specific letters by pointing to them and naming them, having children locate a given letter, underlining, and so on. Use basal reader readiness pages and other worksheet practice pages only as needed or if alternative materials are not appropriate.

5. Make no particular attempt to have children master a story or word within a story, but do emphasize letter recognition. Encourage a child who shows interest in words to attempt to read the words or the whole story with your help.

STAGE TWO
LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE PROCEDURES FOR THE BEGINNING READER

1. Present a stimulus to a small group or the whole class for a discussion. Nessel and Jones recommend live animals as excellent stimuli. Other stimuli suggestions may be found on pages 6-9 of their book (Denise D. Nessel and Margaret B. Jones, The Language Experience Approach to Reading: A Handbook for Teachers, Teachers College Press, 1981). They recommend that the discussion last 10-15 minutes.

2. Gather the children together in a small group. Invite the children to dictate immediately after their discussion. If you are taking group dictation, use a large lined chart. (If you are taking individual dictation, use any lined paper or you may wish to write directly in the book the child will keep to read.)

3. Ask for a title for the story. If the children cannot supply a title, the teacher should give one. According to Nessel and Jones (1981), the title can also be given after the story is finished but, if given first, it helps to keep the dictation on target.

4. Write in manuscript exactly what the child says. Say the words as you write them. Read the complete sentence when it is finished.

5. Some teachers like to label each sentence with the author's name. For example, Sarah said: ". . . . . ." John said: ". . . . . ." This technique is used most often when the group is just beginning to read and is dropped later when the children can more successfully locate their sentence within the story. There is a tendency to get a description of the stimulus rather than a story with this procedure.

6. When the story is finished, the teacher would read it aloud to the group while they follow along. The group should then read it aloud at least one time. Individuals may then read the story alone while the rest of the group follows along. The teacher should read along with the group and the individual child to insure fluent reading. Reading should be fluent at all times, never word by word. The teacher will usually point to the words during this reading, either by hand or a pointer. The story might be read as many as ten times. (MaryAnne Hall, Merrill, 1981, and Nessel and Jones, 1981.)

(Discussion, dictation, and repeated readings will have taken about half an hour.)

7. Individual word study should take place next during the same lesson. Ask the children to frame or point to a particular word, find a word that begins the same as ball, rhymes with man, has an ing ending, or other activities that will help them learn individual words and practice word attack strategies. Further suggestions for word study may be found in Nessel and Jones, pages 18-19.

8. For children who are just beginning to read, instead of the word study procedures recommended by Nessel and Jones, the teacher may wish to use a sentence-strip matching procedure. The sentence-strip matching procedure which follows was developed by this author based on suggestions from MaryAnne Hall for word and sentence matching in Teaching Reading as a Language Experience, Third Edition, Bell and Howell Company, 1981.

This procedure is to be used when a child or group of children can read very little or none of the sentence. If most of the sentence can be read by them, then this procedure is not needed.

a. Select the first sentence of the story. Prepare a sentence strip of the same size as the chart sentence. For example, if the story was written on a large chart, the sentence strip will be put on chart type paper. If the sentence was recorded in a book, a small sentence strip would be needed so that the words will match exactly one-to-one.

b. The teacher shows the strip to the child and reads it while the child watches. The child then reads the sentence strip to the teacher, with the teacher chiming in if necessary to insure fluency. The child then finds that same sentence in the story and matches the sentence strip to the sentence in the story. When it is matched, the student should read the sentence again. If the student cannot read it, the teacher will read it to the student and then the student will repeat it back.

c. Cut the sentence strip up into individual word cards. The child matches the individual word cards to the sentence on the chart and then reads the complete sentence. If the student cannot read it, the teacher models it with the child repeating after the teacher.

d. Build the sentence on the desk top from the cut up words without referring to the chart. If the child cannot do this, let her look back at the chart once again and reproduce it on the desk top. The child would then read the completed sentence with the teacher modeling as necessary.

e. The teacher will present the words from the sentence strip in isolation in a flash card type activity. They are to be arranged in random order rather than in the order in which they appear in the sentence. Any word that the child cannot immediately read should be matched to the sentence on the chart during later word study. The sentence should be read and then the individual word identified. If the child is not able to do that activity, the teacher would then model the word, ask the child to read the sentence, and then read the word.

9. When working with groups, you may want to make a ditto copy of the story for each child. When working with an individual, one typed or handwritten copy is enough. Nessel and Jones suggest the stories be collected in bound notebooks or composition books by stapling the ditto copies onto the notebook page. The children then draw a picture about the story on the facing page.

10. The children then read the story in their notebooks and underline all the words they know (Nessel and Jones, pages 22-23). They may then read the story again with other children or with the teacher from the chart, with particular attention paid to words they did not know.

11. The children, having worked in several different ways with the story, then read it individually, again underlining any words they know. They will have two lines now under words they knew previously and one line under words they now know for the first time. They are not expected to know all the words in the story (Nessel and Jones, page 24).

12. Make a window card by cutting a rectangle space in an index card. The space should be large enough to expose a whole word. The teacher then uses the window card to isolate those underlined words and asks the child to read them. If a word is read immediately and correctly at sight, it is written on a word card to be used later in individualized skill activities (Nessel and Jones, page 24). When children forget a word, they can be directed back to the story in which it appeared and helped to read it again in context and then on the card.

13. In a classroom setting, a story might take a week's work from the stimulus discussion and dictation to independent activities with word cards. In a practicum setting with a small teacher-pupil ratio, a story might be finished at one sitting with an able reader, and in two or three sessions with a less able reader.

14. If the teacher is working with an individual rather than with a group, the same basic procedures can be followed, but each child would have an individually bound copy of each story as a separate book. A suggested procedure for binding books may be found on pages 137-138 in Hall's book mentioned earlier. Suggestions for binding books may also be found in the Language Experiences in Reading Kits (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1976, 1974).

STAGE THREE
LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE PROCEDURES
FOR THE CHILD WHO IS READING

The child who is already reading can follow the same basic procedures outlined for the beginning reader earlier in this paper but does not need as much direct teaching from the teacher in how to pronounce the words in the story. Rather, the emphasis should be on comprehension, on vocabulary building, on expanding writing skills, and on editing the completed story in preparation for publication. The following steps might be followed in a typical lesson with a third or fourth grade child:

1. Present a stimulus for discussion. Even at the third or fourth grade age, a better story results from having an actual stimulus present rather than simply talking about an event. If a child is good at dictation, you may find that it is not necessary to present a concrete stimulus every day.

2. The child may still want to dictate the story to the teacher in which event it can be written directly into the child's book. At this level, there would be little group dictation and the child would ordinarily be dictating an individual story. At this age, most children are capable of doing the writing themselves and want to do so. Check to see how your child performs in doing the writing himself. Some authorities believe

that a better story, with more complex vocabulary, will result when the child continues to dictate. These authorities would recommend that the child sometimes write the story himself and at other times dictate to the teacher. If working with two children, one child can dictate and the other write on his own following joint discussion of the stimulus. At the next session, the roles can be reversed.

3. If the teacher is taking dictation directly into the child's prepared book, a great deal of time will be saved later if experience tells you that this child will have few changes to make. If a lot of editing is necessary, however, or if the child is writing on his own and not using his best handwriting for the rough draft copy, you may wish to write or have the child write on some other paper and transfer the story later to the book. Always consider the amount of time that is necessary for copying the story and make sure that the value the child receives from copying can be justified in terms of the amount of time taken. If it cannot be justified, then the teacher needs to do the copying for the child, perhaps outside of the teaching setting. The final copy may be handwritten or typed.

4. Depending on the grade level of the child, you may write in manuscript or in cursive. If the story is going to be "published" for others to read, manuscript is still a good choice as it will probably be more readable to more people who want to read the book.

5. It is usually not necessary for the teacher to say what she is writing as the child dictates, as was the case with the younger child. If you are working with a child who has far lower than average skills for a third grader, you may wish to continue saying the sentence as you write. This is also a helpful tool to use with a child who dictates very quickly because it will help the child to see that you need time to write what is said before continuing on with the next sentence.

6. The teacher need no longer read the completed story to the child. Rather, hand the copy to him and ask him to read the story silently, asking you for any words that he does not know. After the story has been read, the teacher should raise the opportunity for editing to take place. This is the time to pick a few skills that you are particularly working on, including spelling, punctuation, grammar, use of descriptive words, combining sentences, sequence, clarity of writing, and so on. Do not pick

too many things to edit at a time as this can become defeating to the child, but rather concentrate on a few things that can actually be mastered in the amount of time that you have to work. The child is the final authority during the editing process. If he does not want a particular part of the story changed, then he has the right to refuse that change. The teacher should, of course, encourage the child to correct all grammar errors and spelling errors if they have previously studied that skill.

7. After the story editing is complete, the child may copy the story into the book or the teacher may write or type the story in final form and bind it into a book. If a title was not given to the story at the beginning, the child should be asked to supply a title that shows the child has an understanding of the main idea.

8. Further suggestions for follow-up activities may be found in Russell G. Stauffer, The Language Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading, Harper & Row, 1980, in the section entitled Grade Two and Beyond and in Nessel and Jones, The Language Experience Approach to Reading: A Handbook for Teachers, Teachers College Press, 1981.

Students are encouraged to study the textbooks referred to in this paper to receive a broader understanding of the complexity of the language experience approach and the many and varied activities that can be used by a teacher in implementing this approach. This paper is designed to quickly summarize those major steps that will be used in a typical reading lesson with a kindergartner, a beginning reader, or a reader in about third or fourth grade.

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